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Informational Report

Nonprofit Marketing Strategies

By Ayax Rangel & Paulina Doran

Keys to Success: Engaging and effective social media, mission-focused cause marketing, effective campaigns, captivating content, and strong audience engagement

You're now leading your nonprofit, and you want to get your message out. What do you do?

" Most NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) failed to report any direct or concrete social media strategy to guide their published content or evaluate their outcomes.**"**

Marketing services and products provided by nonprofit organizations to the wider public -and especially their intended target audiences- become a challenge when executive directors and boards lack the underlying insights of marketing professionals in presenting their content to create a cohesive brand and message.

Defining a target audience can also be an arduous task, which involves learning the interests and characteristics of your current donors and stakeholders. This strategy requires charting out demographics (age, gender, location, etc.) and psychographics (personality traits, attitudes, etc.) to find out what criteria need to be focused on for effective promotion [1].

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Still, understanding whom exactly an NGO needs to target and the tools used to carry out the mission can be perplexing. This is especially true when communicating to users that meet target audience critieria via social media. They require a specific message, but there are few resources and experts to accomplish this task for most NGOs.

For example, in a survey of 9,000 nonprofits, it was noted that over half of groups only ran their social media accounts one-two hours per week [2]. Most NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) failed to report any concrete social media strategy to guide their published content or evaluate outcomes [3].

Those that do have an active social media presence still tend to fall under the radar. They fail to concentrate their efforts on messages to direct supporters to their won charitable causes over other NGOs in a busy digital world with excessive social media channels and diligent competition [4]. This makes it more crucial than ever to enhance one's social media tactics.

Through our research, we offer our member nonprofits best practices that can be implemented by leaders and staff, even if nonprofits don't possess marketing experience.

Best practices for social media strategy.

Social media can be an inexpensive and economical method of marketing NGO cause-related services and products. However, it must be used wisely to reap the most benefits to effectively engage an intended audience, increase active participation in the form of donating time and money, and boost organization performance. Past research has shown three ways that social media content can be presented and edited to elicit the most trust, ensure consumer or donor fulfillment, and increase the number of individuals that participate in or give to campaigns [5].

First, it's important to be open and disclose as much as possible about an NGO's background and social initiatives with full transparency, so that social media browsers feel the material presented is honest and real. This can include, for example, financial reports or annual revenue earned. Doing so can build trust among the target audiences, as they are able to understand the process of how voluntary gifts from outside parties are used, the general successful operations of the NGO, and how its work also functions to benefit a donor's altruistic aspirations. Transparency also ensures that an audience feels optimistic and confident about the mission presented and the associated brand through the development of a closer connection [6].

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Second, it is paramount to ensure that information posted is widely circulated and shared on all major platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, and that the content chosen to display is useful to the demographics targeted with an emphasis on learning valuable knowledge. Thus, content should be related to the benefits of participation and donating, since users are highly inspired and encouraged to help when they feel their efforts are met with positive impacts [7].

This type of content can also solidify or create a positive shift in a target audience's attitudes towards the NGO's mission and vision. For example, when individuals better understand the inner workings of an organization and its concrete achievements, or are moved by a poignant narrative, they are more likely to contribute funds and hold the nonprofit in a higher regard [8]. This is because this type of information earns the audience's trust.

Third, NGOs must put emphasize communication and networking with their donors and consumers on social media platforms to ensure that they feel interconnected to the objectives of the group. The more efforts directed at speaking to, and identifying with, online users, the greater the chance that these will feel positively toward the cause and have confidence in the message [9], since the audiences are receiving quality online support from the NGO staff [10].

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When trust is earned, social media users become more likely to share content and increase their amount of comments and virtual exchanges on the NGOs profile via their chosen platform [11]. In addition, usage of these key social media techniques can amplify general donor and consumer satisfaction, which also propel an individual's motivation to contribute to a cause-related campaign and spread the word about the NGO's work to others both in-person and online.

How do you evaluate social media success?

Another critical insight into social media marketing is gauging where an NGO's current efforts are falling. This includes platform usage and general user engagement in the forms of likes, shares, and other forms of active participation. Typically, an NGO's products and services shown through its digital platforms convey them with identities, which can be classified into several types based on these factors [12].

Some organizations are online mavens, running many different social networking accounts that trigger massive audience activity. Running many accounts requires a strong staff of employees invested in social media endeavors, operating at least seven platforms for their brand.

However, similar results can also be seen with organizations that use fewer than six accounts (called selectives). Selectives support high intimacy and interactivity on the few accounts they do utilize, which produce large user engagement.

> " Nonprofit groups fail to produce sufficient engagement responses, which can be related to a lack of financial resources diverted to social media labor, resulting in social media stagnation."

Other nonprofit groups fail to produce sufficient engagement responses. This insufficiency is usually due to a lack of financial resources directed to social media staff or account stagnation (not posting or replying to an audience). It can happen to both brands with more than seven social networking accounts (butterflies) or less than seven accounts (wallflowers).

Consequently, NGOs must understand that proper financial allocation and a sufficient number of employees can make or break metrics, activity, and traffic. To transition from a wallflower or butterfly to a maven or selective, an NGO

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must have a business mindset for the benefits this tool can have for supporting its philanthropic intentions through greater stakeholder donations and outside sources of revenue.

Boosting your online presence with creative social media strategies.

In addition, there are many inventive techniques in emphasizing an NGO's message for a charitable cause, which can be helpful in communicating with potential clients and donors in an effective manner. In a study of the top 100 companies and brands, researchers found a plethora of common methods used to present a strong narrative on social media that involved transforming audience emotions or providing practical material to inform users [12].

It is also important to consider how a message or content from an NGO's social media profile will be viewed by its core demographic. Some goods and services provided by a nonprofit may be best presented based on how useful and serviceable they are to a specific audience, while others may have the greatest impact on donors and consumers based on the emotions they evoke.

The Auerbach Global-Impact Foundation
2137 Otis Drive, Suite 306
Alameda, CA 94501 USA
theagif.org

> **"** Capitalizing on a person's environmental awareness through their ability to hear, see, and engage other senses can revolutionize the way they approach and understand a brand.**"**

Another recent trend for marketing strategists is to integrate sensations into online viewers' experience when talking about an NGO's goals. In this way, they capitalize on people's environmental awareness through their ability to hear, see, touch, and engage other senses, which can revolutionize the way online viewers approach and understand a brand.

Example of an interactive digital advertisement that users can scan for certain products and click to navigate or place an order.

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Further, providing potential clients or donors the ability to contribute or increase their usual involvement with a social media post can also be helpful in captivating their attention. For example, over 70% of top brands have taken their business to the next level
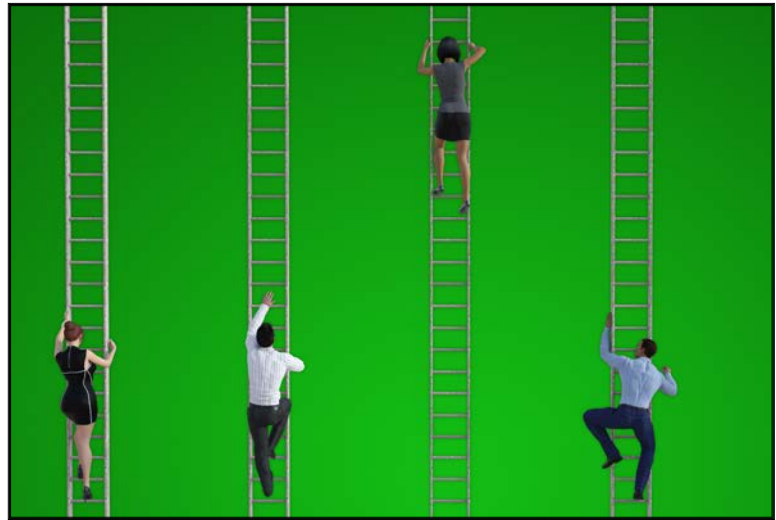
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by creating a game to advertise their content, which allowed players the ability to interact with an advertising tool in a subtle and unnoticeable fashion. In this way, social media users were drawn into the interactive content as a leisure activity and then were provided material that bothered them less than traditional, intrusive ads.

NGOs can also focus on how services or goods they manufacture equate and match up to others focused on alleviating similar societal ills or championing comparable causes. These services or manufactured goods can be more indirect (not referring directly to the group but simply a generic leading competitor) or more straightforward (mentioning another known nonprofit).

In other ways, simply differentiating one's corporate identity (distinctive goals and displays of thriving performance) can also act as a positive strategy for online growth, where unique traits can help a NGO stand out. This can be further strengthened with the use of a spokesperson or mascot to solidify a character for a particular brand.

It is also common practice for social media marketing experts to incorporate certain ideas and concepts into their published posts to establish a connection with their audience or reiterate a certain suggestion. Mimicking words and pictures of a similar theme (such as "buried treasure") can help resonate a message for an NGO service or product. Focusing on individuals and their own likeness through powerful phrases (such as "you deserve it") that affirm their importance can also draw engagement to a post.

Additionally, making an effort to target a specific type of person via an invitation and accentuate that only certain users can participate may heighten a user's desire to learn more about the content provided, simply because it is so exclusive.

The ins and outs of cause marketing.

Another effective technique is capitalizing on the benefits of cause-focused marketing, which can transform the amount of engagement directed at an impactful mission. Cause marketing showcases that a for-profit company cares about a particular cause, such as a charitable venture. In doing so, a company can offer its supporters the ability of endorsing and contributing to society, while supporting other establishments that are doing similar acts [13].

One prime example is Montblanc's "Signature for Good" movement. The company, who is known for its writing tools and leather goods, donated a porton of shopping proceeds to the UNICEF to aid their academic intiatives. Cause-focused marketing with both an image and words ensure that nonprofit services' potential clients or donors are steered to content directly without confusing distractions [14]. In fact, cause-focused ads are the top tool for grabbing the attention of viewers with 55% of participants on a global survey giving more money and donations to NGOs with aims to benefit the larger community [15].

Cause ads are even more valuable than campaigns that simply rely on just humans' emotions or verbatim information for advertising purposes [15]. Thus spectators can see the message of an ad clearly and process the content faster, which is typically due to the fact that information tends to be sensed as more emotional in nature. NGOs can construct digital marketing campaigns with visuals that either present the expression of a person receiving support from the nonprofit or a picture related to the unique social cause to catch a person's eye.

Using gender to evoke campaign attention.

Men and women can also reference cause-related ads in a unique way, which can be beneficial for groups who are targeting primarily male or female donors to back an initiative. Male users browsing an ad may pay more attention to products or services that are functional and practical, while female users may attentively be drawn to products that bring them happiness, pleasure, or any other strong emotion [16].

For example, women may have a greater emotional response from NGO ads that present an image of a human face of a marginalized individual with authentic emotions who has been lent a hand by a noble charity [17]. Women also process any marketing content faster than their male counterparts, which can aid NGOs in channeling their target audience.

The takeaway.

In general, a sound social media strategy and purposeful cause marketing campaign can make the difference between flourishing and floundering in a competitive online landscape of NGOs that are passionately pursuing donations, stakeholder buy-in, and support for their charitable causes. Shortcomings in resources such as a lack of specialized marketing professionals, limited time, and sparse financial backing do not have to delay business sustainability or the potential benefits from promotional marketing [2].

Instead, NGOs can find in comfort in applying proven tools and tips that can boost their bottom line, overcoming any approaching obstacles in the world of digital social media.

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About the authors:

Ayax Rangel

Ayax is a foreign language professor at the Defense Language Institute in Fort Bragg, NC. In this capacity, he imprints language and cultural competence on Special Operations Forces Soldiers of the US Army. Himself a war veteran with seven years of military service, he was honorably discharged in the fall of 2017 with an exemplary record. In his last role, Ayax was responsible for managing a portfolio that included: personnel recovery, training procurement, foreign language readiness, and equal opportunity for 1st Battalion, Psychological Operations (PSYOP), US Army, assigned to South America as its primary area of responsibility. Associated duties required constant vigilance of political developments abroad and assessment of threats posed to fellow deploying service members.

Other assignments within the organization include an overseas deployment to the US Embassy in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, as a program manager for a PSYOP team and a rotation in 5th Battalion PSYOP, requiring military training in Asian regional studies and Chinese Mandarin.

Before his arrival to PSYOP, Ayax deployed as an Infantryman on a combat tour to Kandahar, Afghanistan in the summer of 2012 as part of Operation Enduring Freedom with the 3rd Infantry Division.

Ayax has further distinguished himself as an active member of his community. He currently serves in the NCPTA Board of Directors (2018-2020 term), in the Resource Development, Governing Documents, and Executive Committees, and has been appointed a Human Relations Commissioner for the City of Fayetteville, NC (2018 - 2020 term). In 2018, Ayax received the honor of being selected to the Fayetteville Observer's 40 under 40 for distinguished community service.

He is also a volunteer at the Auerbach Global-Impact Foundation (AGIF), a nonprofit. As Director of Research some of his duties include developing plans of action, conducting target audience analyses, producing reports and targeted messaging, training and supervising staff, and collaborating with the Executive Director on strategy and delivery.

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Paulina Doran

Paulina is a recent graduate from Drury University, who received her Bachelor of Arts in psychology and writing. During her time in academia, she facilitated a support group for clients with chronic illness and physical disabilities at Circle on the Square, a holistic life center and mental health facility, using therapeutic coping techniques from positive psychology. She was also vice president and secretary of her local Sigma Tau Delta chapter.

Currently, she is a fellow at The AGIF, who assists the research department in collecting data for their library of tools and resources geared toward marketing, leadership, human resources, strategic planning, and data management for nonprofits. She also has assisted in devising strategic marketing plans by conducting analyses for key target audiences. Her other duties include planning and implementing usability studies and surveys for website development.

In her spare time, she does independent contracting with companies like UserTesting, participating in usability tests and moderated studies for UX design, development, and research of applications and websites. In addition, she runs her own online retail and consignment store, where she resells vintage goods and inventory to the public on the Poshmark app.

In the future, she plans to eventually pursue a career in user-experience research and obtain her master's degree in human-computer interaction. She hopes to focus her studies in exploring accessible features for individuals with auditory and visual disabilities, providing them more functional tools to navigate and interact with mobile and desktop platforms.